The Gish Girls Talk About Each Other
To
ADA PATTERSON (Photoplay Feb – Jun 1921)

All we have in common is our mother," said one of the most unlike sisters in the world. Lillian Gish spoke. The young tragedienne whom John Barrymore has called "The American Bernhardt" sat staidly in a chair according to the accepted relation of chairs and sitters. Dorothy Gish, the comedienne, perched on hers. It must be chronicled of Mrs. James Rennie that she sits on her feet. She is more comfortable so and neither her sad-eyed sister, nor her mother, nor her bridegroom ever reproves her for the acquired in childhood habit. It's a part of her and none of the family wants to lose any part of Dorothy.
The sisters had promised to talk about each other to me. They had agreed to tell the truth, frankly, as they saw it. The time was a recent Saturday afternoon. The place was the apartment occupied by Mrs. Gish and Lillian. Hard by was that of the"7ecently made Mrs. James Rennie with her handsome young lord. Yes, at the Hotel Savoy, although the address of the pair is 132 East Nineteenth Street. "We give teas at the Nineteenth Street address but live here," said the bride. "It will be so until we have thoroughly furnished the apartment."
"What do you think of your sister's marriage?"
Lillian Gish of the wide, blue, thoughtful eyes, that register such depths of feeling on the silver sheet, adjusted herself and the skirt of her girlish blue serge suit on the gilt backed chair. "I approve it," she said. "It is fine to have a man about the place. It is the first time in my recollection that we have had one. Our father died when we were babies. It seems odd for Jim to come in to breakfast in his Japanese kimono. I didn't know men wore such things, at least in the morning."
"Japanese kimonos? Yes, indeed, they're emphatically the thing," Mrs. James Rennie assured her.
"You think a man's handy to have about the house?"
"Yes, to drive nails and tell you about stocks and bonds and to put the waiter in his place," rejoined Miss Gish of the wide, wistful eyes.
"And what do you think of your sister being single? Would you like to see her married?"
"Yes, why not?" Dorothy flashed her answer. She is as swift of speech as the tragedienne is deliberate.
"Kipling said something about travelling faster if you travel alone, didn't he?"
"I don't believe that," from Dorothy.
"Didn't Duse say that one should live life fully, round out one's existence with every legitimate human experience? I stand with Duse. Still"—one of those little grimaces that delight her audiences,—"Lillian may become the old maid of the family.
Mother always chided me because I had to go fishing for anything in my trunk or bureau drawers. Lillian's bureau drawers and trunks are always models. If any of her things were displaced,— or should I say. misplaced,—it would be a calamity."
"Do you ever quarrel.-""
"No." Lillian Gish spoke with her quiet, last-word-on-the-subject manner. "We have never quarreled because we respect each other."
"Not even when you directed your sister in a motion picture?"
"No. We knew that each was working for the other's benefit. Dorothy followed my directions as she would any other director's. We were both pleased with the result. The picture, 'Remodelling a Husband,' was a good one. But I shouldn't want to be a director. I am not strong enough. I doubt if any woman is. I understand now why Lois Weber was always ill after a picture. Directing requires a man of vigor and imagination."
"What are your points of greatest difference?"
"Dorothy likes to go about. She mingles with people. I don't." Mrs. James Rennie wagged her side-bobbed head. "I must be among people. I need them. I think it helps me in my work. I watch how they do things and whatever I see comes back to me when I am before the camera."
Lillian Gish turned the blue depths of her eyes upon me. "I have given up going among people," she said. "They interest me. But I have never been able to keep engagements. I just love Mary Pickford. She often asked me out to her place at Beverly'Hills. I would think I could go but at five o'clock when I should have been going home to dress for dinner we would decide to work until seven. Something like that always happened when I wanted to go out to see Mary. After your friends have asked you five or six times and you have to telephone that you are very sorry but you can't go, they stop asking. That is quite natural. And so I gave up going out. I draw my ideas of how to do things from within. I think of how I would do whatever I had to do if I were in the person's place."
"What do you most admire in your sister?"
For a moment Dorothy Gish's sparkling eyes took on depths of seriousness.
"Her gentleness. Lillian never offends anyone." I met Lillian Gish's calm, blue gaze in inquiry. "I most admire Dorothy's honesty. No one could make Dorothy tell a lie. Sometimes, when cornered, I evade." Dorothy Gish leaned far forward, clasping her small hands boyishly between her knees.

"But people don't want to hear the truth. I've found that out. They have asked me for the truth and I've told them and hurt them. I wanted to help them but I only hurt them. I would love to have Lillian's diplomacy."

"What is your ambition for your sister?"

"I want to see Lillian on the stage. I believe she would be another Maude Adams."

"Nobody could be like Miss Adams. My admiration for her is boundless. But she will always keep her niche. No one will ever be like her. Mr. John Barrymore, whom I met the other day for the first time, assured me that screen work is harder than stage work. But I don't know that I could ever develop my voice to the strength for the stage. I want to see Dorothy progress in her comedy. Comedy is a great deal harder than tragedy. Tragedy plays itself."

"No. Besides, tragedy is what lives. No one remembers a comedy. But 'Broken Blossoms' and 'Way Down East' will live," spoke Dorothy.

Even their portraits differ. Lillian, with one of her rare, and rarely sweet, smiles produced an old photograph of a rotund, serious child borne down, it would appear, by a heavy weight of care.

"This is Dorothy's picture when she was a baby. The family call it Grandma Gish."

"Yes. Look on this and then on that."

The "that" at which Dorothy Gish's brown head nodded was Helleu's portrait of Lillian Gish as he saw her, a mist of bluish grays, enswirling, cloud-like, a delicate face with. deeply, widely blue eyes, of the soberness and inscrutability of the Sphinx.

What of the worldly wisdom of these young pet sons, that wisdom that has to do with the care of earned increment? "Dorothy likes to spend money," said her sister. "Mother thinks I am the conservator of the Family funds. Perhaps that is true. I have a deep, overwhelming fear of poverty. I look far into the future. I have resolved that when I am old I shall have more than one dress and three hundred dollars."

"It takes more than that to get into an old ladies' home now," said Dorothy. "The price of old ladies' homes has gone up. It used to be $300. Now it's $500."

"You know that, dear? Then remember it," admonished Lillian.

"We're here today. Gone tomorrow. Let us enjoy today." Mrs. Rennie snapped
her small fingers. Entered a slender, silver-haired woman, round of face like Dorothy, graceful and with wide, thoughtful distance between the eyes, like Lillian. Both girls sprang to their feet. Both said: "This is Mother.' "She isn't a bit like a stage or studio mother," testified Dorothy. Through her the talented twain derived their membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution and their eligibility to the Colonial Dames. Through her, too, they are kinswomen of the youngest Justice of the Supreme Bench of the United States, Judge Robinson.

"You were talking of saving and investing?" said Mis. Gish. "The family joke is that neither of my daughters cares for real estate, while 1 crave it. We could have bought lots in Los Angeles for $250 a piece a few years ago. I favored it but I was the minority. The lots have since sold for $5000 a piece."

Lillian lifted her head. "But if we had bought them we would have had the Gish luck. That part of Los Angeles would not have improved li would have toed stock still."

Bitterness? No. Only a belief that the Gishes are not of those to whom delightful things happen. They must earn by toilsome ways their profits and success. They drifted back into recollections of their still near childhood, "Lillian used to put beans up her nose." From the mask of comedy.

"Dorothy would nevet keep quiet. Once she was spanked for it." From the mask of tragedy.

"Lillian cried because I was spanked. She cried long after I had stopped. She could always cry easily and make others cry in sympathy. She used to make the neighbors cry just by looking at them. They all told mother she 'would never bring that child up,' " Mrs. Rennie mimicked a toothless neighbor's mode of speech.

At four Dorothy made her debut in public gaze in "Last Lynne." At the same time her sister, Lillian, at six, was playing the same tear-guaranteed part in another company.

Returned alter their barnstorming the sisters prattled of their tours and the wisdom therefrom derived.

"And now I'm a vegetarian," announced Sister Lillian.

"That's nothing. I'm a Catholic," proclaimed Dorothy. Which was interesting though not true.